

# Section 17 Methods of expression

## Guiding Faculty

Albert Dorne, Founder  
[1904-1965]

Norman Rockwell  
Al Parker  
Ben Stahl  
Stevan Dohanos  
Jon Whitcomb  
Robert Fawcett  
Peter Helck  
Austin Briggs  
Harold Von Schmidt  
George Giusti  
Fred Ludekens  
Bernard Fuchs  
Bob Peak  
Tom Allen  
Lorraine Fox  
Franklin McMahon

Ben Shahn  
Doris Lee  
Dong Kingman  
Arnold Blanch  
Adolf Dehn  
Fletcher Martin  
Willi Barnett  
Syd Solomon  
Julian Levi  
Joseph Hirsch

Milton Caniff  
Al Capp  
Dick Cavalli  
Whitney Darrow, Jr.  
Rube Goldberg  
Harry Haenigsen  
Willard Mullin  
Virgil Partch  
Barney Tobey









## Which way?

"What is presented to us here — apart from the materials employed — has nothing to do with painting; some formless confusion of colors . . . the barbaric and naive sport of a child . . ."

" . . . ugliness that is most appalling . . . artistic degeneration . . . subterhuman hideousness . . . furious scratches . . ."

These are two quotes from French and American art critics. They were discussing the 1905 to 1908 exhibitions of *Matisse*.

Today most people have no trouble understanding and appreciating the creations of Matisse — but you've probably heard ruthless criticisms of other, newer artists. All innovators, especially in the arts, have had to put up with a certain amount of misunderstanding.

You should be open and receptive to the many modern ways of expression. Don't dismiss or scorn any aspect of art without attempting to comprehend it. Artists are serious workers; they are concerned with the many directions art can take. As they do, you must understand that reality in art is independent of literal, visual scenes and objects; art has its own truth and reason for being.

This section has been structured to give you insight into different ways of working; to help you realize that art runs parallel with changes in technology, philosophy and society.

We have come to new frontiers in all fields of human accomplishment. In many ways, the artists are way out in front — like a scouting party. Therefore, they are able to see what the rest of us can't as yet.

Modern artists are also aware that classification has been discarded. Until very recently artists (like it or not) were grouped into particular "schools" or "isms." We've had the baroque period, the Renaissance, impressionism, expressionism, cubism, surrealism, op, pop, hard edge, and so forth. But now you are free to work in any medium, any combination of mediums, any way you choose. There's no need for you to conform, to be imitative.

You will be influenced — artists must be sensitive to voices that speak to them from the past and to the clamor of the present. But being influenced is a far cry from being imitative.

In this section, you'll find specific projects. For each, we'll give you a problem based on a definite premise (a fact or facts accepted as true). Then, together, we'll investigate various ways to solve the problem.

Following these procedures, you'll gain an understanding of what modern artists have been doing. We believe that, if you stand in another's shoes, you'll find out how he walks.



# 1

*Road with Cypresses, detail, Vincent van Gogh  
Collection of Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller Otterlo, Holland*



*Dead Fowl, detail, Chaim Soutine  
Courtesy the Art Institute of Chicago  
Joseph Winterbotham Collection*



*Jonah, detail, Albert Pinkham Ryder  
Courtesy National Collection of Fine Arts  
The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.*



## Emotions

**Premise:** The difference between a good likeness and a work of art comes only from the artist's feelings—his reactions to people, places, and situations. Many artists have made their feelings a more important part of their art than the subjects themselves.

The tracks across these pages suggest the way emotions swirl, converge around, and fly away from things that make up life. You and your feelings change, not only from day to day, but often from minute to minute. Your senses can range from a low point (depression) through a mild dissatisfaction or pleasure, all the way to a blistering rage or an ecstasy of joy.

**Problem:** Think about a situation, a person, or a thing that aroused an extreme reaction in you. Then express this intensity in paint.



*Tiglon*, detail, Oskar Kokoschka  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Benjamin Scharps and David Scharps Fund



*Tugboat at Chafou*, detail, Maurice Vlaminck  
From the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John Hay Whitney



**Suggested approaches:** Your picture may depict a subject, or be abstract. Just keep in mind you are to make your *feelings* visible. If people or objects do appear in the painting, they should be incidental.

One way you can express emotions is through colors. They needn't be natural; in fact, they should be exaggerated, intensified.

Another way of conveying strong feelings is through *application*. Let the thickness or wetness of your paint, the action and direction of your strokes, help carry your message. Swirling patterns that merge, break apart, and swim away can reflect your feelings. Through gesture alone, you can charge your creations with joy, anger, or alarm.

In working on this project, remember the words of Van Gogh: "I follow no system in painting. I hammer away at the canvas with irregular strokes and let it all stay as it is—here and there impasto, raw canvas in places, unfinished corners."

Paint rapidly, spontaneously. What you're after is a daring solution. See how well you can communicate an experience with a minimum of thinking or reasoning.

*Woman 1*, detail, Willem de Kooning  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase





# 2



## Dreams and fantasies

**Premise:** By now you know that reality in art is independent of literal scenes and objects. Anything, including pure feeling, can be painted. And dreams and fantasies are also valid subjects for the artist.

The comparatively new science of psychoanalysis has made us aware that we have a subconscious; we know that our submerged selves are often responsible for things we do, ways we react.

And you've learned that as long as you're alive, your brain keeps working. You may be sleeping, but the subconscious part of you stays alert. Sometimes it presents you with scenes and images difficult to recognize. It's often hard to believe these dreams have any connection with you. But they do. They're as much a part of your total personality as your consciously conceived daydreams, your hopes and wishes, the castles you build in the air.

**Problem:** Make a painting of your own dream world. You may base the picture on a fantasy you've deliberately created, or a dream that came to you in your sleep.

**Suggested approaches:** Portray familiar, everyday things in illogical compositions: You could draw a house, people, animals, and objects all jumbled together instead of as they would appear in reality.

Find ways to make human beings or scenes unreal: elongate or shorten people; alter the way a building or a street would normally look by exaggerating perspective.

Create vague, misty shapes that express otherworldly, spirit-like qualities. Give soft, swirling edges to your dream subjects; make them appear illusory.

You might begin with an object or a person and dissolve the subject so that it becomes something else entirely, as so often happens in dreams.


In this project, you could also use your sense of humor. Draw a rock with legs, if you like, or a flying camel.





Photograph by  
Sigrid Estrada





### Many-sided reality

**Premise:** Ours is an age of questioning, of asking why and why not. Artists today are trying harder than ever before to find new answers — often to the problem of how best to portray the many facets of truth and reality.

More than most people, the artist is aware that all things are different when viewed from various eye levels and angles. For instance, when you go to see a play, your eyes can absorb only what is set before you on a stage. At the movies, however, you have hundreds of viewpoints. The camera acts as your eyes; it goes around, into and out of an infinite number of scenes.

As a painter, you have the choice of making a picture that presents one aspect or many. Take an automobile, for one thing. The picture directly above shows a very real, very recognizable car. So do the photos surrounding it, yet all are different. Why not put a number of these views into one drawing?





**Problem:** Paint one object or a group of objects; include various points of view in the one picture.

**Suggested approaches:** Do some preliminary sketches before you begin the painting. In the method illustrated above you can see that the parts of the car are all still there, all still real, but the total image has been fractured and rearranged to show its curves, planes, ins and outs.

To follow this approach, first make a pencil drawing of your subject. *Simplify* the forms; make them geometric. Then cut or tear the picture into many pieces and rearrange them. Using the reassembled image as your guide, make your painting.

Another idea is to draw your subject so that shapes or forms *overlap*; let some or all occupy the same space.

A third suggestion is that you keep moving around the subject; draw as you move — from the front, to the side, to the back, to the other side. Stand above it and below it. Put as many viewpoints as possible into the one picture.



Simplify



Fracture, rearrange



Overlap



Include various eye levels



# 4

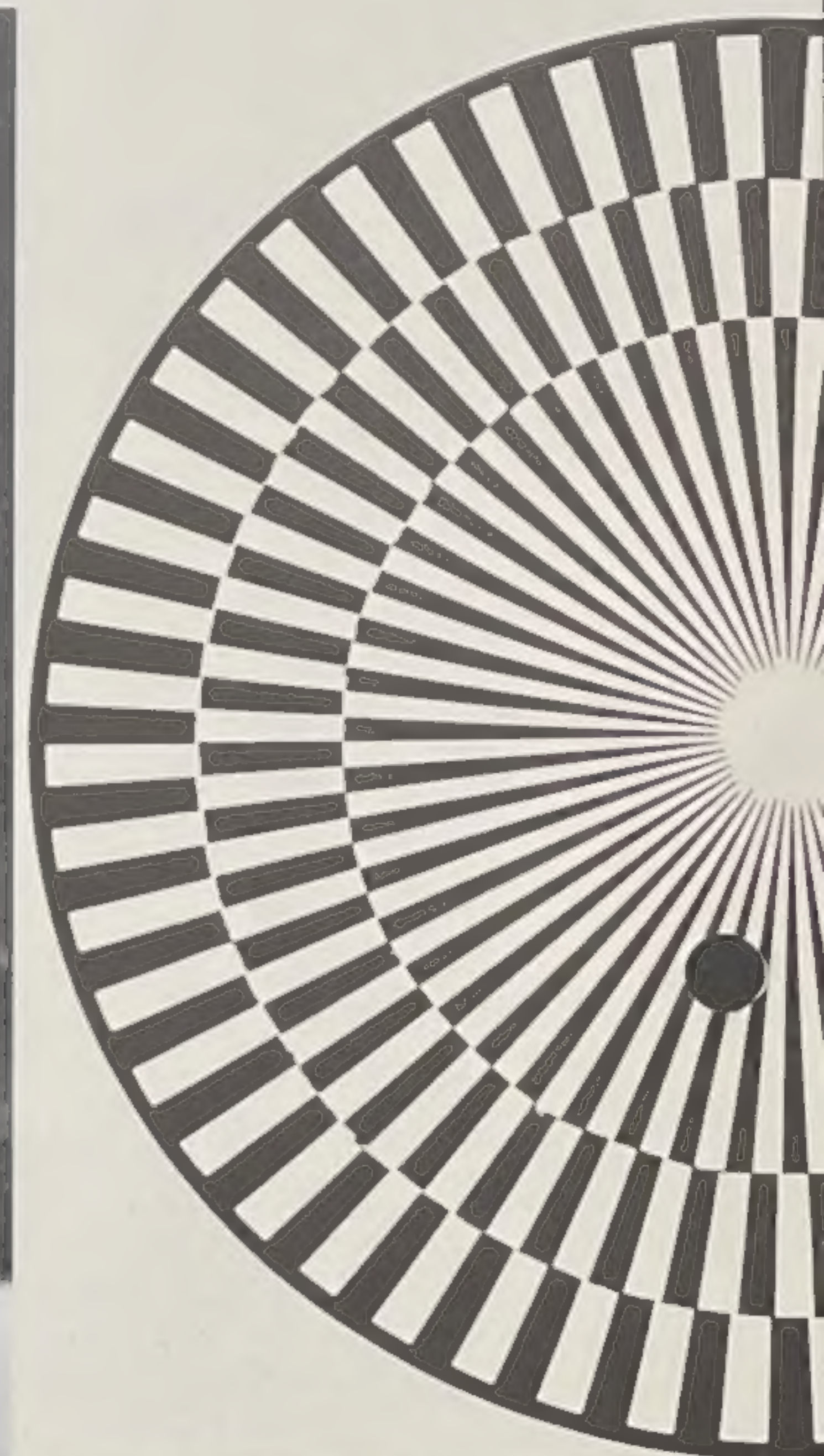
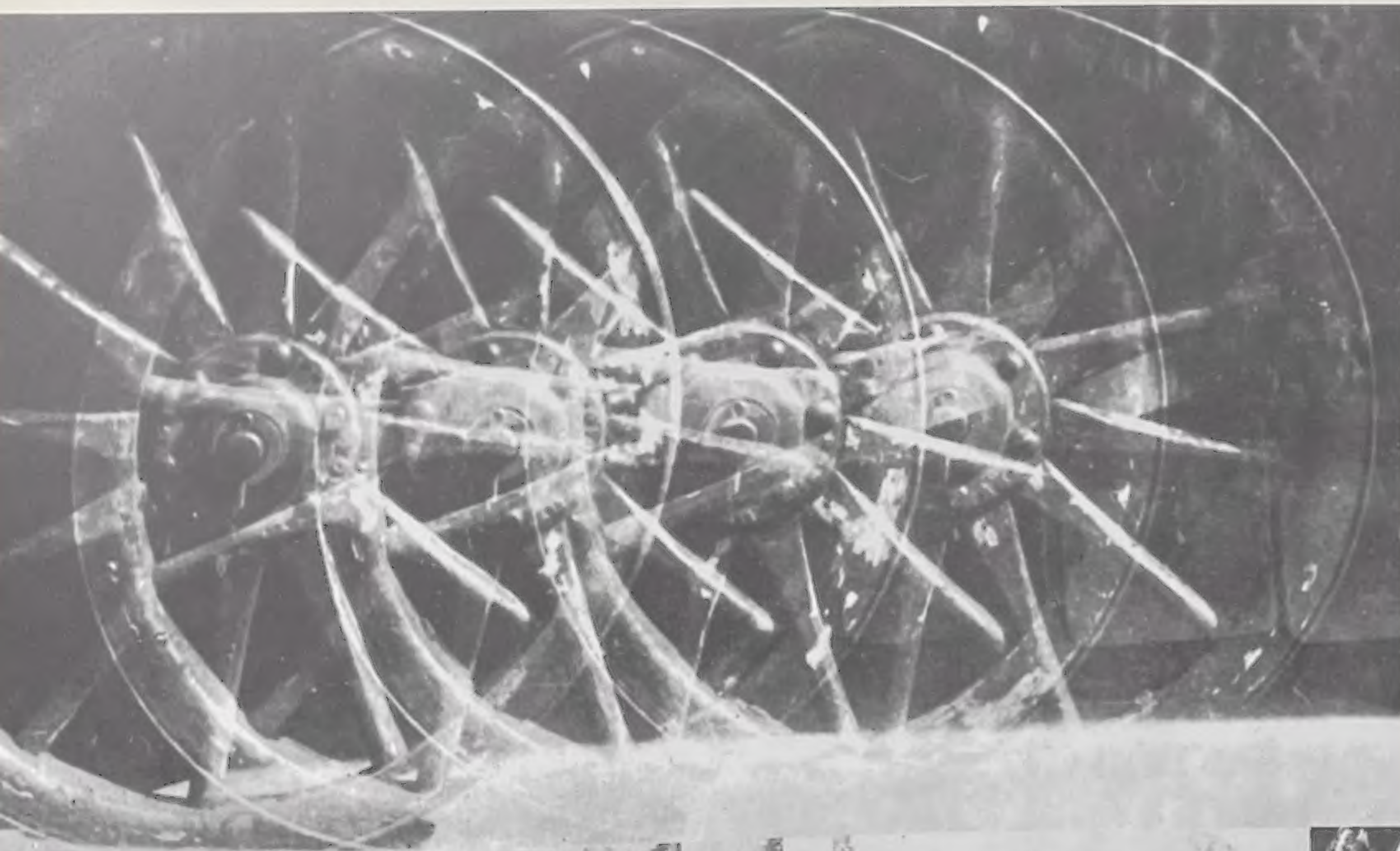
## Movement

**Premise:** Some artists, sensitive to the speedup of all phases of life in this century, have concentrated on portraying pure movement, regardless of their subjects.

What we're able to perceive of all motion is a comparatively narrow view. Movement ranges from the slowness of things growing, to the leisurely ambling of a person out for a walk, through the speed of a bullet, all the way to the fantastic swiftness of light. The human eye can't see any of the extremes of motion—the slowness of growing plants or the speed of light. But we are aware of movement through our other senses, if not always by sight.

As an artist of today, you should concern yourself with movement. New inventions, the quickness with which we receive information, the swiftness of modern travel—all these things and more make motion an important part of the world that the artist lives in and reacts to.

**Problem:** Create a work of art that expresses your idea of the way something moves.





**Suggested approaches:** Try the futurist idea of multiple images superimposed, one overlapping the other. Or you might construct a piece of sculpture that moves, or can be moved.

Paint an optical vibration that suggests speed: that is, show the whirling of a dancer's skirt, the spinning of a football in the air, or the blur of a hummingbird's wings.

*Think* about motion as you work. Remember the sound of an engine in a car or a plane. Remember how stationary objects at the side of the road seem to flash by as you rush down a thruway. Remember what happens to trees in a violent wind. This kind of thinking will result in gestures that will, in themselves, help you create the sensation of movement or speed.



Photograph by John Karamon



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## Geometric abstraction

**Problem:** Given a set of points in the plane, find a line that separates the points into two sets, each of which is contained in a half-plane.

**Input:** A set of points in the plane. **Output:** A line that separates the points into two sets, each of which is contained in a half-plane.

**Problem:** Given a set of points in the plane, find a line that separates the points into two sets, each of which is contained in a half-plane.

**Suggested approaches:** One approach is to use a linear programming algorithm to find a line that separates the points into two sets, each of which is contained in a half-plane. Another approach is to use a geometric algorithm to find a line that separates the points into two sets, each of which is contained in a half-plane.

**References:** The book "Geometric Algorithms and Combinatorics" by Edelsky and Seidel (1990) contains a chapter on geometric abstraction.



# 6

## Be a rebel

Give the art world and yourself a hotfoot.

How? Break every single so-called “rule” of painting and composition. If necessary, go through the Course and make notes of what we suggest will result in a meaningful picture. Then do exactly the opposite — make a wild drawing, consciously and on purpose.

Or poke fun at a painting you’ve already done, one of which you’re very proud. Select a creation that’s earned you a good grade and then make one that’s totally different in technique, color, and composition. Have you painted a fine still life? Paint it again, but this time stand it on end or on the diagonal. Make a picture in which all the elements are crowded into a corner. Use colors that are absurd in combination.

Why? Because if you want to grow and learn, you mustn’t regard any established, academic rules — or any of your own efforts — as sacred. You’re still exploring. See what happens when you attempt bold, defiant, deliberately mocking methods.

Successful innovators in art have always been just as adventurous as Columbus, the Wright brothers and Lindbergh. They know that if you want to erect a new building, you have to tear down the old one that’s standing in the way. So have a ball — a wrecking ball.

Go ahead. Shock us. We dare you.



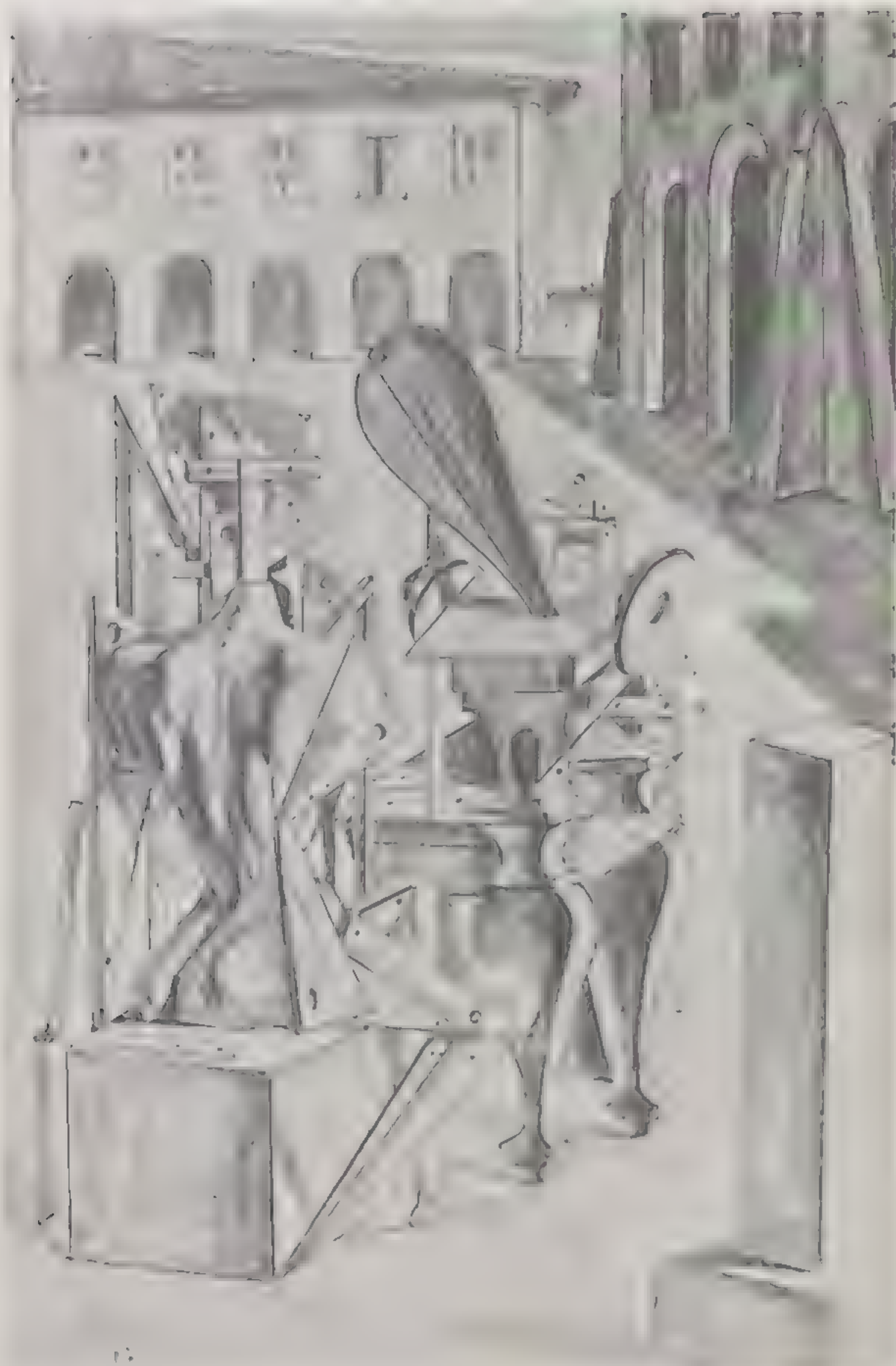




# Gallery

Here and on the following pages you'll find paintings by men who have solved the kind of problems you attacked in this section. They prove that there is no barrier in art that can't be removed: feelings, dreams, notions about space, time, movement, geometry — they are all a vital part of today's art. And there's no telling what you might succeed in making visible, if you keep exploring.

*The Mathematicians*  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of Mrs. Stanley B. Resor



The *fantasy* at bottom left is by Giorgio de Chirico. An Italian artist, de Chirico had a conventional training, but even while he was still a student he was painting eerie, other-worldly scenes. In his pictures, familiar objects are combined — often against a background of classical architecture — in a totally unrealistic fashion. He is a master at using perspective to create a sense of the world of dreams.

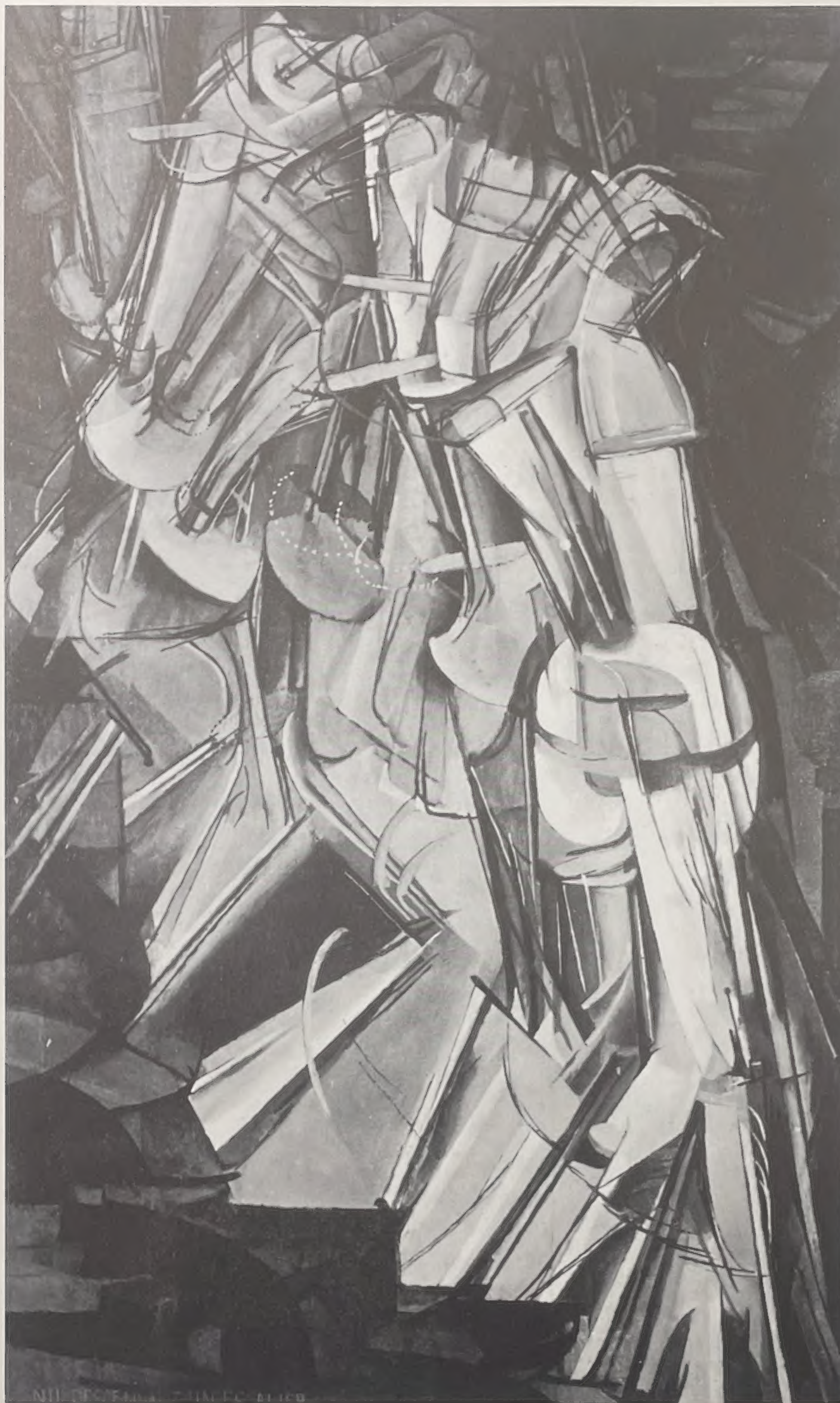
The painting at right below is by Edvard Munch, one of the pioneers of modern art. In all his creations, *emotion* is the dominant theme. The restless lines in this picture, the expressions on faces, all convey extreme tension. Like Van Gogh (who was a tremendous influence on him) Munch was painfully conscious of the dark side of life. If he painted even a calm forest pool, he would make the viewer acutely aware of ominous eddies beneath a placid surface.

*Anxiety*  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase



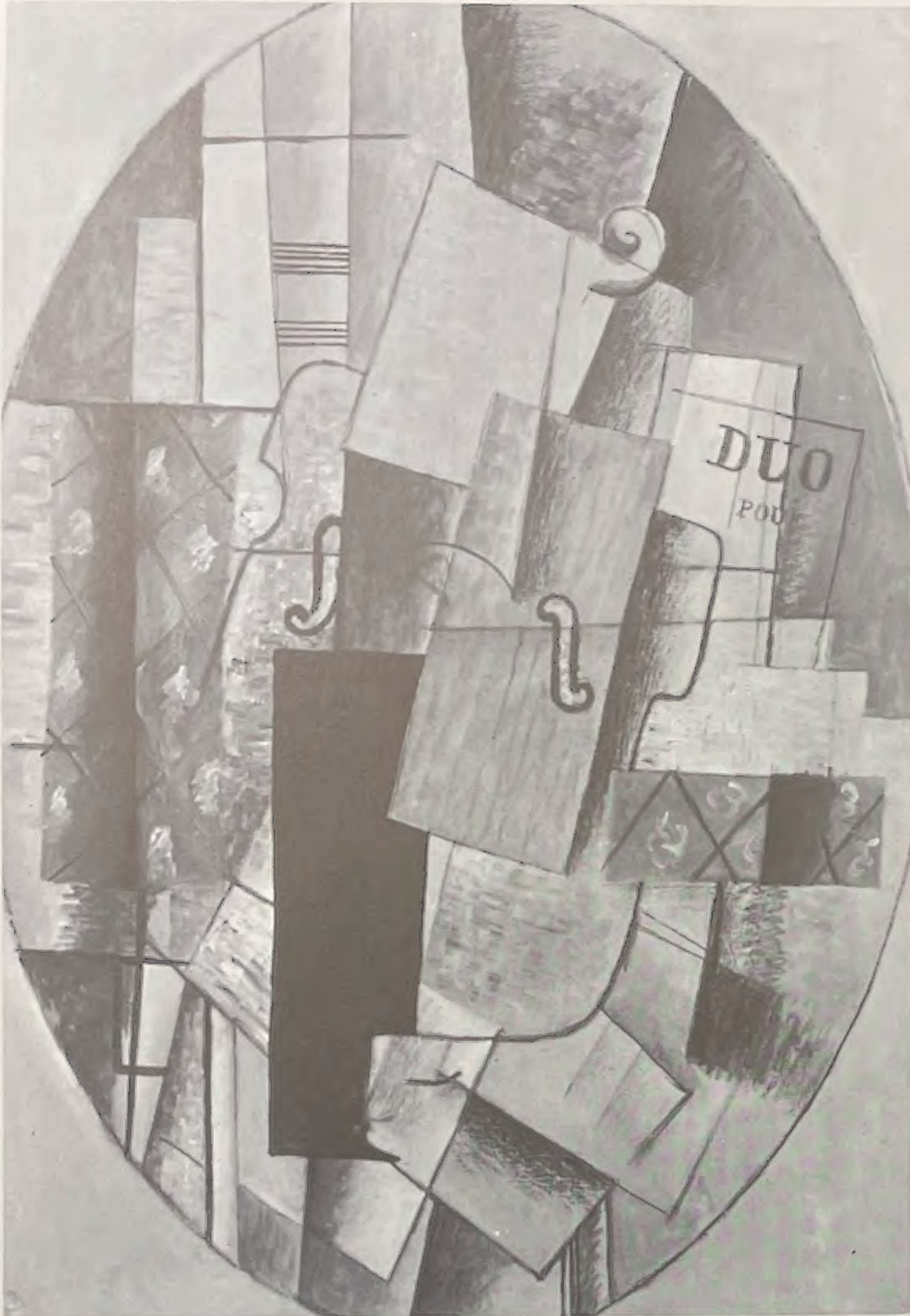


*Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2, 1912*  
Philadelphia Museum of Art  
The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection



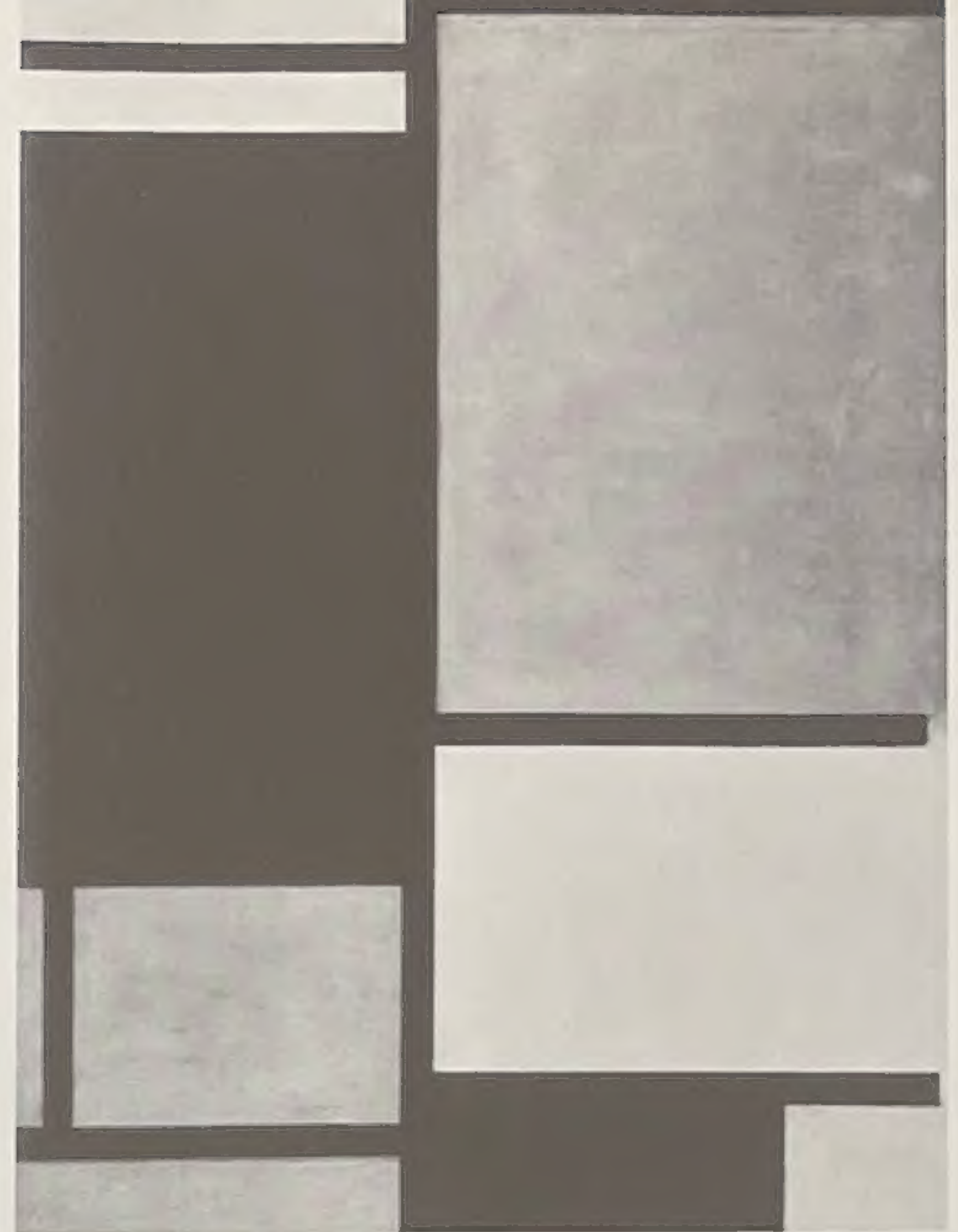
When this painting by Marcel Duchamp was first exhibited, it caused a sensation. Nothing like it had ever been seen before; the artist had portrayed pure *movement*. His overlapping figures show the way a person comes down a flight of stairs, rather than the actual human being in a static pose.





*Oval Still Life*  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Gift of the Advisory Committee

And here we have an example of the brisk, often joyous, always rebellious spirit of the Pop artist. It typifies the upsurge in creativity that inspires artists of today to try anything and everything. They have wit, a sense of humor, an impudent imagination—all these qualities have led them to find art subjects in everything from the comics and advertising to the old masters themselves.



*Composition, 1921*  
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

Piet Mondrian painted the *geometric abstraction* above. He is perhaps the best-known exponent of this severely formal style. Most of his paintings are based on simple vertical and horizontal units, usually in black on a white ground, with the addition of a few primary colors.

The painting at left is by Braque, who, along with Picasso, broke long-observed rules about picture space and perspective. Braque is one of the giants of the twentieth century; this is an excellent example of his ability to show the *many sides* of real objects.

*Les Six*, Anthony Berlant  
Courtesy David Stuart Galleries, Los Angeles





## Important

These instructions are extremely important to you. Read them through carefully from start to finish before doing the assignment work.

"The function of the artist is to show his feelings about the outer world, or his own inner world, through *his eyes*." Ben Shahn

## To send to the School

## Section 17 assignment work

In the last section we talked about the materials of expression. In this one we are considering *how* and *what* to express.

The six projects in the text can be exciting, rewarding experiences for you. Because of their value to you in your future art career, we'd like you to take the time to *try them all*, even though we are asking to see only one.

As you know now, expression can take many forms. In the gallery pages you are given examples of what some other artists have done with similar problems. They are there for you to look at, but remember, those artists solved the problems in *their* way. We want you to solve yours in *your* way.

Work in any medium you wish, no larger than 16 x 20 inches.

Of the projects you do, choose the *one* you like best and send it to the School for our reaction.

Print on the back of your work:

**Your name**

Student number

Address

Assignment number

(over, please)

Cut along this line—and mail with your assignment

## Comment sheet

In the space below, tell us which of the projects this one is, and as much as you can about what you have expressed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student number \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



### **Check before mailing**

Your assignment carton should contain:

- 1 of the 6 projects in the text — no larger than 16 x 20 inches
- 1 comment sheet (on other side of this page)
- 1 shipping label filled out completely with your name and address

Mail this carton to:

**Famous Artists School**

**Westport, Connecticut 06880**

Note: Be *sure* your work is thoroughly dry before mailing.